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ABSTRACT

Mentoring is important in developing successful professionals in a variety of fields. The mentor offers the protege a source of knowledge and support, which, in turn, gives the mentor satisfaction. To find a mentor, a person usually decides on a field of interest, and once this is accomplished, the individual searches for someone with similar interests and values. Mentors can employ several techniques to aid their proteges. These include modeling, feedback, contingency management, instructing, questioning, cognitive structuring, and task structuring. For students in graduate psychology programs, all of these tools can help the student learn both research procedures and therapeutic techniques. However, mentors must be aware of the potential harm of a dual relationship when he or she also serves as a student's teacher or supervisor. If the mentor can keep the roles separate, then the mentoring relationship can continue. This problem of duality can be especially difficult for females and minority students in a field dominated by white males. Still, mentoring remains a useful and valuable relationship for helping graduate psychology students become independent professionals. Contains 11 references. (RJM)

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Mentoring: Utilizing this Relationship in the Graduate Education of Psychology Students and Possible Concerns

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Running head: MENTORING: UTILIZING THIS RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

The nature of mentoring and its benefits are discussed in relation to graduate study in psychology. Techniques used by the mentor to impart knowledge to the mentee is mentioned with examples relevant to this area. Also discussed are possible ethical concerns that may arise such as dual relationships and female and minority student issues.

Mentoring: Utilizing this Relationship in the Graduate Education of Psychology Students and Possible Concerns

The mentoring relationship is very important in developing successful professionals in a variety of fields. These fields include business, education, medicine (Harmon-Bowman & Elmore, 1982),and social work (Taibbi, 1983). For graduate students in psychology, mentoring can lead to the development of competent practitioners and researchers as well.

By the nature of the mentoring relationship, both the mentor and the mentee can receive benefits. The mentor imparts knowledge and experience to the mentee and the mentor gains satisfaction from aiding in the development of an independently functional professional.

There are circumstances, however, where ethical concerns may arise. For instance, in the graduate school setting the mentor may also be a faculty member with whom the mentee has classes. This could lead to conflicts of interest due to the dual relationship with the student. Other problems may occur for female students and male mentors (while the reverse situation may also lead to problems, the literature had no

information on it since it occurs much less frequently). Sexual harassment can result from the difference in the power relationship between mentor and mentee (Fuehrer & Schilling, 1987). Male chauvinism is another danger when the mentor is male and the mentee is female (Cordova, Neely, & Shaughnessy, 1988). Another area where problems are seen is in the relatively small number of female and minority mentors available for those students who would prefer a mentoring relationship with someone of their own sex or cultural background (Cordova et al., 1988; Flaxman, 1992; Moses-Zirkes, 1993; Swerdlik & Bardon, 1988).

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is an interpersonal relationship that is usually reciprocal in nature and involves some degree of interdependence (Ianni, 1990). Due to the reciprocity, both mentor and mentee receive benefits from this type of relationship.

The benefits for the mentee are fairly self-evident. The mentor is a source of knowledge and experience for the mentee as well as a source of advice, support, and challenge (Swerdlik & Bardon, 1988). For graduate students in psychology, the mentor can aid in long-range career planning, encourage involvement in current research projects, help get a

first paper published, and give information on how to set up a private practice upon receiving licensure. In return, the mentor has more time for other activities by delegating some of the more straightforward tasks to the mentee such as entering data into a computer or administering simple questionnaires. The mentor also gains satisfaction in seeing the mentee become a successful and independent professional (Swerdlik & Bardon, 1988). The enthusiasm generated by the mentee incites enthusiasm in the mentor. They may discover a wide range of similar interests beyond psychology such as sports and music.

How then does the mentoring relationship come about? The formation of this type of relationship may be a consequence of the capacity humans have for developing strong attachments (Gallimore, Tharp, & John-Steiner, 1992). However, these attachments do not necessarily occur with just anyone when it comes to mentoring. The search for a mentor usually begins with a student's interest in a particular field. Once the student has identified a field of interest then a mentor may be chosen from that area. The student tends to choose a mentor based on similar interests, values, and the perceived benefits to be obtained by entering into a relationship with that person. The mentor, in

turn, tends to take a personal interest in the student perhaps because he or she sees something of himself or herself in that student and provides guidance on becoming a professional in the field (Clawson, 1985).

Once the mentoring relationship is established, the mentor has a variety of ways with which she or he can impart professional knowledge to the mentee. One way is through modeling. Modeling provides the mentee with an image of the desired behavior which is to be emulated (Gallimore et al., 1992). In psychology, the mentor can demonstrate the appropriate way to administer, score, and evaluate an intelligence test. This gives the student a mental image of the behavior she or he should strive for in giving this test.

Once the mentoring relationship is established, the mentor may use a variety of ways, one of which is modeling, to impart professional knowledge to the mentee. Modeling provides the mentee with an image of the desired behavior which is to be emulated (Gallimore et al., 1992). In psychology, the mentor can demonstrate the appropriate way to administer, score, and evaluate an intelligence test. This gives the student a mental image of the behavior she or he should strive for in giving the test. Another way in which modeling could be used is for the mentor to demonstrate

Play therapy techniques to the mentee. This will be helpful to the student who will doing an internship at a site dealing predominantly with children.

Feedback is another important tool the mentor can use. This involves providing the mentee with information regarding performance on a task (Gallimore et al., 1992). Giving feedback allows the mentee to self-correct future performances (Gallimore et al., 1992). The practicum setting is an ideal place for a mentor to provide feedback to a mentee studying psychology. Here, the student can perform some therapy technique studied and, then receive feedback concerning what was done correctly and incorrectly and then use this information to improve identified techniques.

Contingency management involves reinforcing or punishing behavior (Gallimore et al., 1992). In psychology, a mentee that performs research tasks at above average levels can receive reinforcement from the mentor through help in getting the research published or by encouragement to take on more challenging areas of endeavor. Likewise, a mentee who cannot follow the ethical guidelines of the profession may be seriously reprimanded by the mentor or even expelled from the program.

Another form of assisting a mentee is instructing. Instructing involves clarifying information or leading the mentee through a problem solving sequence (Gallimore et al., 1992). When a student is beginning to learn evaluative techniques, it is helpful for the mentor to carefully explain and guide the mentee through the process to increase understanding of how the process should work.

Questioning prompts the mentee to think about something in a different way (Gallimore et al., 1992). Learning about ethical codes in psychology may at first seem rather straightforward to a student. This can be quickly challenged by raising a series of questions that the mentee may have never considered before. Thus, the mentee is forced to see the world in a highly situational and value-based way.

Another useful technique is cognitive structuring which involves "providing explanatory and belief structures that organize and justify new learning and perceptions and allow the creation of new or modified schemata" (Gallimore et al., 1992, p. 17). For example, the mentor may follow the transactional analysis approach to human behavior. By explaining this theory and the beliefs underlying it, the mentee is given a frame of reference from which to understand

how this approach can be applied to a therapeutic setting. This provides the mentee with a new way to affect changes in behavior.

Task structuring is the last method Gallimore et al. (1992) discussed which involves taking a task and breaking it down into manageable portions that are dealt with in a specified order. An example of task structuring in mentoring psychology graduate students would be hypothesis testing in research. Hypothesis testing involves a series of steps beginning with forming a hypothesis to be tested and ending with making a decision to retain or reject the hypothesis. The mentor can assist the mentee through this process by breaking the task down into its respective steps, explaining the logic in dealing with them in a particular order, and leading the mentee through them.

Possible Ethical Concerns

While mentoring can be a highly effective way to bring new people into a profession such as psychology, there can be ethical problems that result from such a relationship as well. Many of these problems, however, can be resolved without actually ending the mentoring relationship itself.

One area where problems may arise in the graduate study of psychology is when dual relationships occur in

conjunction with a mentoring relationship which may be due to the possibility that the mentor and mentee may also be faculty and student or supervisor and supervisee. Under these circumstances, the person in the power position (mentor, faculty, supervisor) must be very careful to keep each of the roles separated. Successful role separation will allow the mentoring relationship to continue, however, if unable to do this, then the mentor is in violation of ethical codes regarding dual relationships. According to the 1992 American Psychological Association ethical codes, multiple relationships should not be entered into by a psychologist if there is a danger of losing objectivity, effectiveness as a professional, or exploiting or causing harm to another person (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1993).

Another area of concern involves situations where the mentor is male and the mentee is female; common combination because there tends to be more male mentors available than female mentors, especially in the field of school psychology (Swerdlik & Bardon, 1988). The problems increase when sexual harassment occurs which may be a result of the difference in power positions in such a relationship. Another contributing factor leading problems between mentor and mentee may be

differences in the way each person perceives their role in the relationship (Fuehrer & Schilling, 1987). Male chauvinism can also be a problem when there is a male mentor and a female mentee (Cordova et al., 1988). Very often, women are treated differently than their male counterparts in the higher education setting. Male mentors tend to lose patience with female students who have responsibilities, such as a husband and children, outside the world of academia (Cordova et al., 1988).

There also tends to be a lack of available mentors from various ethnic backgrounds, which may be a problem because minority populations may require special support and assistance from the mentoring relationship (Cordova et al., 1988). If the mentor and mentee are from different and unfamiliar cultures, the mentor may not be able to relate to the mentee in meaningful or productive way. This could lead to misdirecting the student or the student may begin to feel alone and isolated from peers.

While the ideal mentoring situation may be between a mentor and mentee of the same sex or ethnic background, productive and effective mentoring can take place with different combinations of gender and culture (Moses-Zirkes, 1993). What is required for success in

this type of mentoring relationship is an understanding of and sensitivity to the special needs of minority groups and women.

Conclusion

The mentoring relationship is unique because it is reciprocal in nature. Both mentor and mentee receive benefits from the relationship. The mentor is a source of knowledge and support for the mentee and by helping the mentee become a competent professional, the mentor gains satisfaction and can devote more time to new projects and areas of interest.

This special relationship does not seem to occur between just anyone. Finding a mentor is usually the result of first deciding on a field of interest and once this is accomplished, the student searches for someone with similar interests and values as mentor. As this is a reciprocal relationship, the mentor must have some personal interest in the student as well.

When a mentoring relationship is established, the mentor has several techniques he or she can use to aid the mentee in becoming a professional in the field. These techniques include modeling, feedback, contingency management, instructing, questioning, cognitive structuring, and task structuring. All of these tools can be useful in helping the mentee learn

research procedures as well as therapeutic techniques in the graduate study of psychology.

Finally, there are areas where ethical concerns can arise as a result of or in conjunction with the mentoring relationship. One area of concern is the possibility of harmful dual relationships occurring due to the fact that the mentor may also be an instructor or supervisor. If the mentor can keep the roles separated then the mentoring relationship can continue and if not, the mentor is in violation of ethical codes.

Another area of concern involves the lack of female and minority mentors in the field of psychology. Female and minority students tend to have special needs that may not be recognized by the mentor. In the case of female students and male mentors, sexual harassment and male chauvinism are potential problems. For minority students with nonminority mentors, there is a danger of misdirecting the student or the student may feel isolated. Most of these problems can be avoided if the mentor is aware of differing values and the values and needs of the mentee.

Mentoring is a useful and valuable relationship for helping graduate students in psychology become independent professionals. While there is a potential

for problems to occur, most of these can be dealt with without ending the mentoring relationship that exists or seriously harming either party.

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